

Indian Rose Annual - IRA 2016.1

Two Rose Mysteries – An Appearance and a Disappearance

Girija and M.S. (Viru) Viraraghavan

Mia Grondahl's fascinating account of her love affair with Rose Edward is a difficult act to follow, but we will try.

The first mystery is the rather sudden appearance of Rose Edward, the universally popular pink, incredibly fragrant garland rose, so well known in India. As mentioned in Mia's article, the standard view on how Rose Edward originated relates to roses in Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean, called Ile de Bourbon when it was a French possession in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to this version, rose hedges were common around farmers fields in Reunion, and were planted with two kinds of roses growing close together, the China rose 'Old Blush' also called 'Parson's Pink China (which is continuous blooming) and the twice blooming 'Autumn Damask', also called *R. damascena bifera*, 'Quatre Saisons, and Bussorah (in Hindi). A hybrid seedling of these two roses arose by accident and this was Rose Edward (Edouard), a continuous flowering pink semi-double rose with, as we mentioned earlier, a most captivating fragrance. This new rose was noticed by M. Perichon, a garden superintendent in Reunion, and plants and seeds were distributed by him both in France and in India, as well as in Mauritius (?).

That Rose Edward arose in Reunion is hotly disputed by no less a person than India's premier hybridizer, Mr. B.S. Bhattacharji, who says that this rose was known from 'times immemorial' in India. Adding to the mystery is the fact that one of the early centres of large scale cultivation of this rose was Thanjavur District in the Cauvery River delta of Tamil Nadu state, even as early as the 1800's.

Could a rose originating in Reunion become that popular in India in such a short period?

Earnest efforts are on to unravel this mystery between Girija and me, Mia Grondahl in Sweden, Behcet Ciragan in Switzerland, Daniel Lemonnier in France and several other rose historians in the USA.

One advance is the DNA study of 'Hermosa' (see article in this annual) which establishes that one parent of Rosa Edward was definitely 'Old Blush'. Perhaps the

theory that the other parent is Autumn Damask could be established if we analyze the findings of the earlier DNA study referred to in this article, namely the research paper entitled 'The Triparental origin of the Damask Rose' by Iwata *et al*, reported in 'Gene' Vol. 259, No. 1, 23rd December 2000, pgs 53-59, referred to by Behcet Ciragan in his article Tulips Trades and Roses, published in IRA 2015. We may also mention that both the supposed parents of R. Edward, Old Blush and Autumn Damask have been growing in India for a very long time.

The basic difficulty in accepting the Reunion origin theory, as Behcet and several others point out, is the fact that Reunion is a tropical island in the Indian Ocean, where the winters are virtually non-existent. Could a rose like the Autumn Damask flower under such conditions? It requires winter chill to flower in the typical manner of the other damask roses.

Another curious point is that Rose Edward itself exists in two forms, the standard repeat flowering bush form and another kind, growing much taller which flowers very rarely but which was a preferred root stock in north India before the advent of the indica rootstock. We had the benefit of discussing about the two forms with the well known rosarian of Lucknow, Mr J.P. Agarwal. Even if the bush form came from Reunion, who would bother to introduce a virtually non-flowering kind from that island to India?

So there you have the unsolved (as yet) mystery of the appearance of Rose Edward. Any input on this from rosarians from India and abroad would be most welcome.

The other mystery relates to the disappearance of what is probably the first ever hybrid of *Rosa clinophylla* - the rose of the tropical areas of Bengal, Bihar and many other places in India, of course excluding *R. x hardii*, the supposed hybrid of *R. clinophylla* and *R. persica*. We are referring to the rose called 'koozea' in Hindi, also known as the 'Rose of the Doon' and *Rosa lyellii*. *R. lyellii* is the name of one of the forms of *R. clinophylla* which is to be found in the more sub-tropical areas of the distribution of *R. clinophylla* in India. That authority on gardening in India in the early years of the last century, Rev. Firminger of Calcutta, describes this rose as '*a plant of extensive growth common in the Upper Province's* (probably referring to Uttar Pradesh State) '*but not met with, that I am aware of, near Calcutta; bears large handsome double blush flowers*'. We have been searching for this rose for many years, as it is a variety obviously of great importance in rose breeding for Indian conditions, but to no avail. Since the variety is called 'Rose of the Doon' we consulted that well known rosarian, Mr Arpi Thakur who came from that area but he could not trace the variety. Later, we learned that this rose was extensively cultivated in the Botanic Garden in Saharanpur, in British times. Saharanpur is near Dehra Doon in U.P. Unfortunately this garden is no longer in existence but there is

still an agricultural extension centre in what was the botanic garden, where perhaps plants of *R. lyelli* may still be growing. Here is a challenge for rose friends especially those from north India. Consider visiting Saharanpur in February/March and be the discoverer of this most important rose. It is really a mystery waiting to be unraveled - a mystery of great horticultural importance. The disappearance of this rose, described by no less an authority as Firminger as 'common' in the Upper Provinces is indeed unbelievable. Hopefully, it can still be found.

In conclusion we should mention that the well known book *The Genus Rosa* by the great English horticulturist Ellen Willmot has an illustration of what is called 'a garden form' of *Rosa clinophylla* which we reproduce. Is this a picture of 'koozea'? Commenting on this picture, there is an observation in *Genus Rosa* that the plate (picture) shows a plant known in gardens as *Rosa clinophylla* (garden form) 'in which the character of toothed stipules and bracts has almost disappeared'.

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The first mystery is the rather sudden appearance of R. Edward, the universally popular pink, incredibly fragrant garland rose, so well known in India and called variously 'cheenia gulab', 'baramasi' and 'desi gulab' (and erroneously, 'Madras Rose'). As mentioned in Mia's article, the standard view on how R. Edward originated relates to roses in Reunion Island in the Indian Ocean, called Ile de Bourbon when it was a French possession in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to this version, rose hedges were common around farmers fields in Reunion, and were planted with two kinds of roses, growing close together, the China rose 'Old Blush' also called 'Parson's Pink China' (which is continuous blooming) and the twice blooming 'Autumn Damask', also called *R. damascena bifera*, 'Quatre Saisons, and Bussorah (in Hindi). A hybrid seedling of these two roses arose by accident, and this was R. Edward (Edouard), a continuous flowering pink semi-double rose with, as we mentioned earlier, a most captivating fragrance. This new rose was noticed by M. Perichon, a garden superintendent in Reunion, and plants and seeds were distributed by him, both in France and in India, as well as in Mauritius (?).

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Rose Edward



Rosa Involucrata (later called *clinophylla*)
"garden form" (perhaps *R. Lyellii*)
in Genus *Rosa*

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